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ABSTRACT

Presented to a United Nations seminar on the role of information in the development of emerging nations, this document presents effective communication as the achievement of results--a change in attitude, practice, and knowledge. Elements of the SMCRE (sender-message-channel-receiver-effect) communications model are used in analyzing communication strategies for development programs, and the following observations are made: communication of technological information cannot rely on the "trickle down" effect to reach intended beneficiaries; diffusion research done by rural sociologists on the process of adopting new innovations is extremely valuable; in the organizational system particular problems exist in getting information from the bottom to the top; and individual communication patterns determine how individuals function in organizations. The following steps are recommended to determine a communication strategy in development programs: identify the individual decision maker, determine his or her location in the system, analyze his or her responsibilities and information needs, determine the behavioral change that is required of him or her, identify generators of relevant information, determine the sequence of channels that will provide correct information in proper form, and follow up to determine if effective communication and change have occurred. Communication flow charts are included. (DF)

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DEVELOPMENT DECISION-MAKERS' PERSPECTIVES OF COMMUNICATION

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DEVELOPMENT DECISION-MAKERS' PERSPECTIVES OF COMMUNICATION

Planning and implementing a development programme is a complex process involving many people who have to make many decisions. In most situations it can be assumed that one ingredient in the decision-making process is information. This seminar is looking at the role of information in the development process. Peter Drucker [1/] said that, "throughout the ages the problem has always been how to get 'communication' out of 'information'." The purpose of this paper is to look at communication in order to establish a framework for utilizing information by development decision-makers.

It has been said that, "a communication expert is someone who cannot explain what he does!" When talking about communication one of the greatest difficulties encountered is the definition of the term. To different people it can mean road transport, telecommunications, mass media such as radio/TV, etc. In this paper communication is defined as being the meaning and results of a flow of information. I believe in the development process it is important to concentrate on the "results" caused by communication -- a change in attitude, change in practice or increase in knowledge level of people involved. The collection, storage and transmission of information with no results is not effective communication. However, in almost every development organization much of the effort spent on information handling produces no results because there are communication break downs.

Communication is the glue in the development planning and implementation process. Seldom is a decision made without some type of information being utilized. Each individual involved in the overall development process -- i.e., political leader, central planning unit economist, director of a malaria suppression programme, agricultural village extension worker, or a subsistence farmer -- are continually making decisions that effect the success or failure of socio-economic development projects

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1/ Drucker, Peter F. (1966), The Effective Executive, New York: Harper & Row, p. 67.

and programmes. The amount and specific type of information used will vary for each individual and for each type of development activity. In general terms a blend of the following five types of information influence the decision-making process (however, the proportion of each in the mix will vary):-

1. Political
2. Economic
3. Technical (i.e., information on a particular fertilizer)
4. Social
5. Administrative

The above five types of information greatly vary in their qualitative and quantitative nature. For example, much information related to political considerations are not quantitative. In fact, much of it is not even documented but rather is based on rumours and other "soft" information sources. The same is true for many administrative considerations. However, in the area of technical and economic considerations information tends to be very well documented and quantitative. The social considerations are becoming better documented in recent years but still tend to be qualitative in nature.

Since communication is a supportive activity which is a part of many other primary activities it has been the subject of study in many different fields such as education, management, mass communications, library/information science, etc. Unfortunately, the communication between people in these different fields who are studying communication has been very poor. This paper draws upon the ideas and concepts from many of these fields of study and applies them to the development process. The following five sections are different perspectives of communication that are relevant to a development programme. My intention is to introduce to the reader some of the key ideas and not to give an exhaustive description of each nor describe specific communication techniques.

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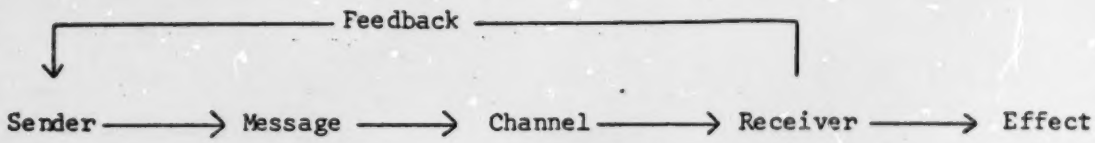
1. Communication Process -- Communication and information specialists have concentrated on increasing the volume of information flows by creating better "delivery systems". Much of this work is based upon David Berlo's book The Process of Communication [2/] which outlines the SMCRE communications model. The model can be illustrated in the following manner:



The original model did not have the Feedback loop nor the Effect component. In fact, the original model was based on electrical transmission theories developed by engineers.[3/]

The Communication Process approach studies each element of the SMCRE model. One problem with this model is that it has primarily a one-way or "top-down" orientation. The feedback is normally after the original communications took place. The second problem with this model is that it assumes increasing the flow of information will have a positive effect and result in a more successful programme. A third problem is this model implies that there is only a single sender and single receiver that effects the communication. This model is a very simplistic view of communication as applied to development projects or programmes. However, realizing that communication takes place in a complex organizational setting, the elements of the SMCRE model are important in analyzing communication strategies for development programmes.

2/ Berlo, David K. (1960), The Process of Communication. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

3/ Shannon, Claude E. and Warren Weaver (1949), The Mathematical Theory of Communication. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press.

..4/-

2. Technology "Content" Message -- Many people involved in development programmes are technical content specialists -- i.e., agricultural researchers, medical specialists, etc. These specialists often assume that new knowledge created through research will automatically be accepted by the intended beneficiaries. This is commonly called the "trickle down effect". Research has shown, and it is now commonly accepted by development planners, that the trickle down effect does not work, particularly when it comes to the poor masses or "pockets of poverty". People who have studied the technology transfer process have concluded that there must be a series of adaptations in order for the technology to be relevant and acceptable by the intended beneficiaries. Chart No. 1 on the following page illustrates this adaptation process. 4/ The reader should note that between each of the levels there is a two-way flow of information. It is just as important for the researcher to know the user needs in order to create relevant new knowledge as it is for the users to receive the information.

3. Clientele Oriented -- A considerable amount of research has been done by rural sociologists on the process of adopting new innovations. This research has been done on villagers, politicians, organizations, research scientists, etc. Extremely valuable information has come from this commonly called diffusion research. 5/ In many cases, development planners and implementors are not aware that this research exists and that much of it was done in developing countries.

4/ Adapted from Chapter 8, Havelock, Ronald G. (1973), Planning for Innovation Through Dissemination and Utilization of Knowledge. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan.

5/ For a good summary of diffusion research findings see Rogers, Everett M. and Floyd F. Shoemaker (1971), Communication of Innovations (Second Edition), New York: The Free Press, 476 p.p.

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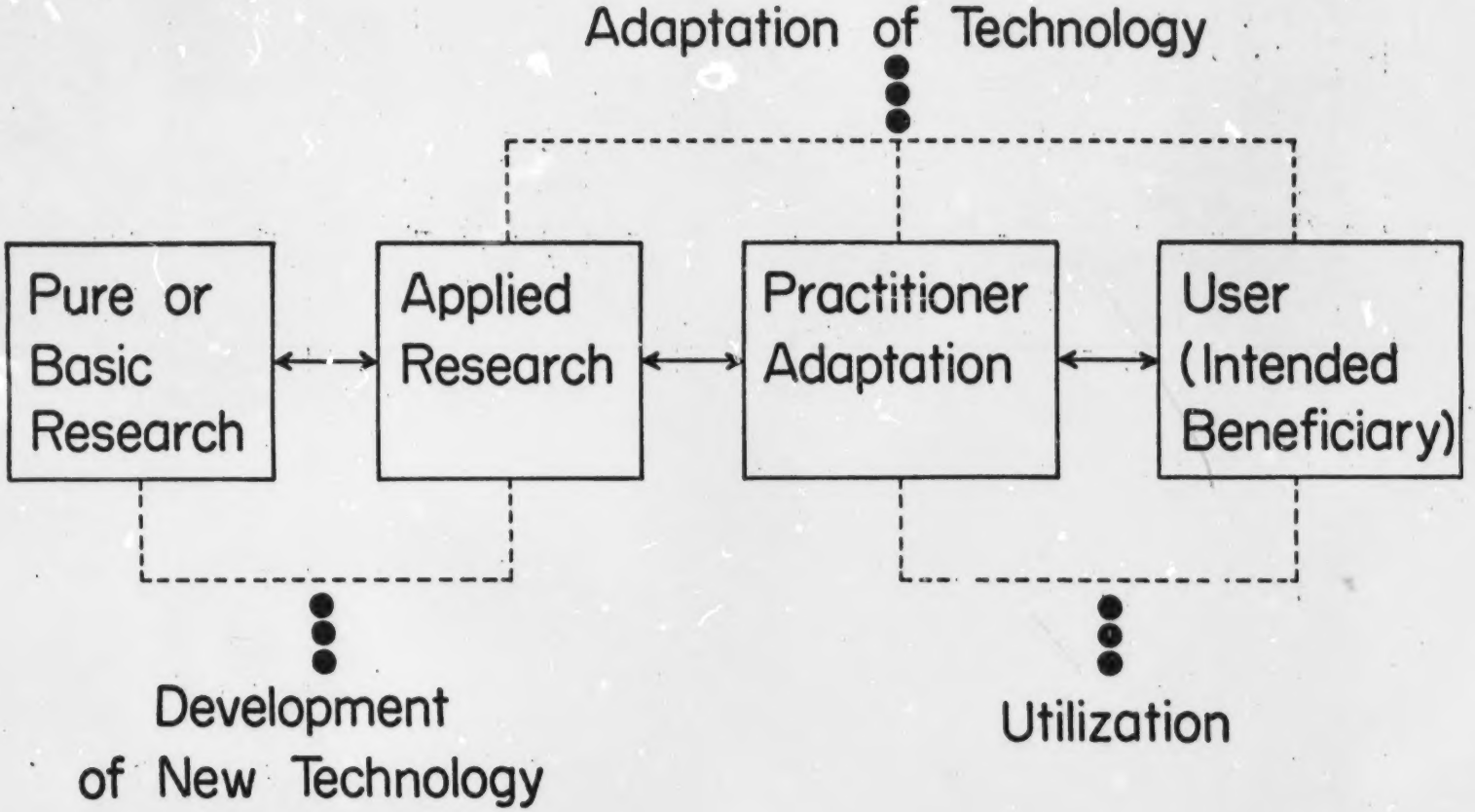
TECHNOLOGY "CONTENT" INFORMATION FLOWS

Chart No. 1



Three basic conclusions have come from this diffusion research:-

a. Among the intended beneficiaries for a new innovation, acceptance takes place over time. Some people accept new ideas much quicker than others. Some will never accept a particular innovation.

b. There is a complex decision-making process individuals and/or groups go through in deciding on accepting or rejecting a new innovation.

c. Once a new innovation is accepted by an individual there is always the chance that at some later time its use will be discontinued. This is particularly common in family planning programmes.

Chart No. 2 on the following page illustrates some of the decision-making phases which an individual, group or organization usually goes through in accepting or rejecting a new innovation. At each decision-making phase different types of information are needed. Also, different channels of communication are more effective at the various phases. For example, in many cases awareness can be brought about through the use of media such as publications, radio, etc. However, at the evaluation stage media are usually not effective and face-to-face communication with family or respected friends being most important. Much of the literature on the adoption process does not give adequate attention to the causes for "rejection" or "discontinuance". Planners or implementors involved in development programmes aimed at helping the poor masses should become familiar with the diffusion research.

THE ADOPTION PROCESS

Chart No. 2

1 AWARENESS

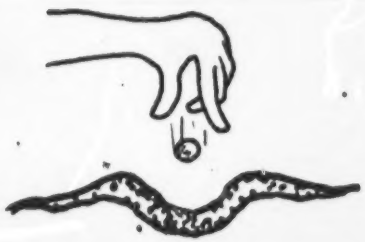
2 INTEREST

REJECTION

3 EVALUATION

6. DISCONTINUANCE

4 TRIAL → 5 ADOPTION → 6 CONTINUE



4. Organizational/Management Systems -- Development planning and implementation almost always take place in large complex organizational systems. The organizational system greatly influences the decision-making process of all the individuals involved.[6/] Chart No. 3 on the following page illustrates the types of groups that are usually involved in the planning and implementation of a single development programme. There must be communication between each of these groups. In most cases a communication failure can delay or even ruin a development project or programme.

I have found that the systems analysis is helpful for evolving an overall communication strategy for a development project or programme. It is very useful for determining where there are potential communication failures. The systems approach also illustrates to planners and administrators the complexity of implementing a development programme.

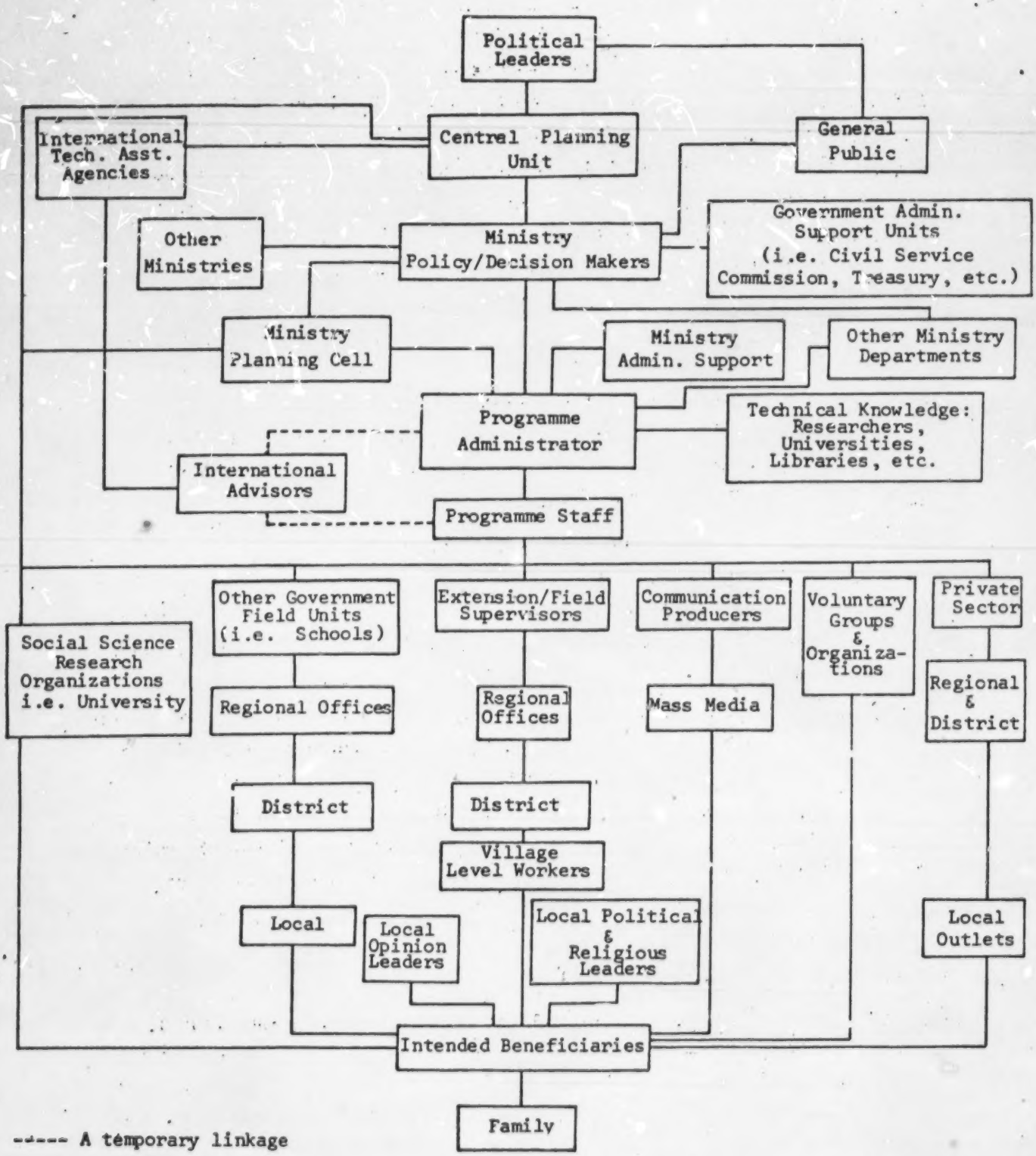
A considerable amount of organizational and management communication research has been done. For example, there are three basic types of flow through the system -- up, down and horizontal. Usually the most effort is concentrated on the flow of information down. However, many times the information flowing down through the system is not relevant to the people at the lower levels. There is almost always great difficulty getting accurate information up through the system. The normal tendency is to tell one's superior what he wants to know. In many cases it is difficult to get horizontal communications between departments or ministries which is one of the greatest problems facing integrated development programmes.

6/ For an excellent review see Katz, Daniel and Robert L. Kahn (1966), The Social Psychology of Organizations, New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Chart No. 3

Systems Analysis of a Development Programme

The Primary Linkages



----- A temporary linkage

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The structure of the system and policies caused by the bureaucracy create communication problems. In most organizational systems one can also find "gate keepers" who withhold information and use it for increasing their power.

A considerable amount of informal information flows exist in many organizations which does not follow the formal organizational structure. More needs to be known about how to exploit these informal information flows. However, for major policy decisions the formal flow of information following the official organizational structure is almost always required.

5. Individual Communication Patterns -- When considering how to improve effective communication within an organizational setting I find it helpful to start from the individual's perspective. Within a development programme many people have to make decisions. Each person has to receive information from many people and they must communicate their decisions to many people. The illustration on the following page (Chart No. 4) gives categories of people an individual may communicate with. Depending upon where the individual is in the development programme hierarchy, some of these groups may or may not be relevant.

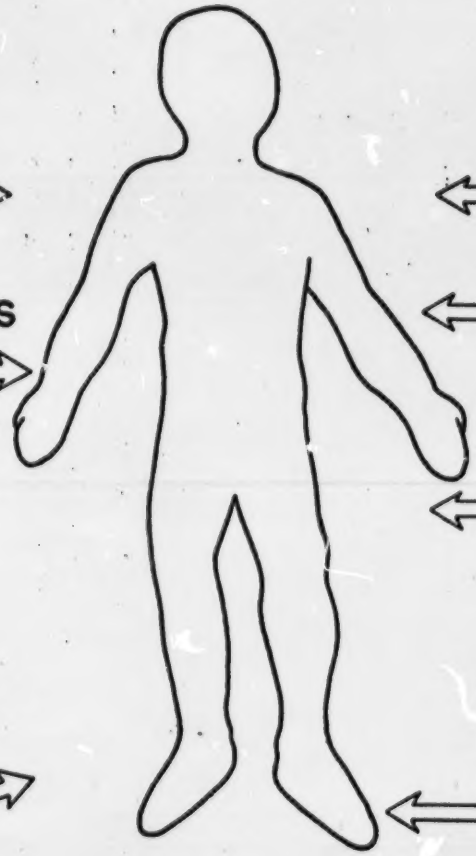
It can be helpful for an individual to identify and even write down the names of individuals or groups that he must communicate with. For each group or important individual identified he can then go through an analysis similar to what was explained in the "Communication Process" section of this paper.

A considerable amount of work has been done to help individuals to function more effectively within organizations. In the field of education, there has been a considerable amount of "change agent" training 7/. Change agents can focus on changing organizations, a practice of a farmer, etc.

7/ For an example of a change agent training course description see Havelock, Ronald G. and Mary C. Havelock, Training for Change Agents, Ann Arbor, Michigan; Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan.

Chart No. 4

INDIVIDUAL COMMUNICATION PATTERNS



Boss and
His Superiors ⟺

Professional Colleagues
and Organizations ⟺

Researchers ⟺

Students ⟺

Subordinates ⟺

General Public ⟺

⟺ Sponsors - Government
International Agencies

⟺ Other Departments

⟺ Intermediate Groups -
Educational
Industry
Media

⇕

End Users of
Information -
Farmers, etc.....

In general terms, the training of change agents include how to:-

a. Identify the current practice of the client and begin at that point;
b. Build a relationship with the client;
c. Assist him in diagnosing his problem;
d. Assist him acquire relevant outside resources if needed;
e. Identify alternative solutions and choose the most appropriate;
f. Assist in implementing the solution; and
g. Stabilize the innovation to ensure that there is no discontinuance.

In the industrial consulting field a considerable amount of work has been done in developing a "process consultation" approach.8/ This approach describes the process which an outside consultant or an individual within the system should follow in serving as a catalyst to stimulate and show the client how to identify and solve his own problems.

Both the change agent and process consultation approaches utilize a number of communication techniques that are particularily relevant to development programmes.

CONCLUSIONS:

The above descriptions are intended to give the reader an introduction to some different approaches to communication that are relevant to development planning and implementation.

8/ Schein, Edgar H. (1969), Process Consultation: Its Role in Organizational Development. Reading, Mass; Addison-Wesley Publishing Co.

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I find the following steps to be helpful in determining a communication strategy within a development programme:-

1. Identify individual decision-maker;
2. Determine where he is within the overall development system;
3. Analyze his job responsibilities and information needs;
4. Determine what behavioural change must take place on his part;
5. Identify generators of relevant information;
6. Determine the sequence and channels that will provide correct information in a proper form; and
7. Follow-up to determine if effective communication and change came about.

The greatest danger facing a conference such as this on information for decision-makers is the belief that a single information system or technique "can do all things for everybody". When discussing information or communication the parameters must be greatly narrowed by identifying specific audiences, messages and desired results. Once that is done then concrete discussions can take place and an action programme developed.

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